

**THE Pillar of Light**  
By Louis Tracy  
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CHAPTER XIII. BEFORE THE DAWN

Discipline slackened its bonds that night. For one thing Mr. Emmett felt ill. Although inured to hardship in the elemental strife, being of the stocky marine in no dread, he had never before been called on to eat sodden bread, to drink condensed steam flavored with varnish, and to chew sustenance from the rind of raw bacon. These drawbacks, added to the lack of exercise and the constant wearing of clothes not yet dry, placed him on the sick list.

Again, there were ominous whispers of unfair division in the matter of food. It was not within the realm of accomplishment that the pursuer Constance, Enid, and others who helped to apportion the eatables could treat all alike. Some fared better than others in quality if not in quantity. The unfortunate ones growled and talked of favoritism.

A crisis was reached when the second officer mustered the night watch. When one sheep leads the others will follow. A stout German from Chicago asked bluntly:  
"Vere's de goot of blayin' at moudlin' gart? Dere is but von ting to eat, und dat is der kidchen."  
Community of interest caused many to huddle closer to him. Here was one who dared to say what they all thought. Their feet shuffled in support. The officer, faithful to his trust, was tempted to fawn on the man, but he thought the circumstances warranted more gentle methods.

"Why are you dissatisfied?" he sternly demanded. "What do you suspect? Are you fool enough to imagine that you are being cheated by people who are dividing their last crust with you?"

"How do you know dat? Dose girls dey are chokin' mit Mr. Pyne all der day. Dey can't do dat und be hungry, like us."  
"You unmitigated ass!" said the disgusted officer. "There is food here for three people. They have had eighty-one of us for two days and will keep us going several more days. Can't you figure it out? Isn't it a miracle? Here! Who's for guard and who not? Let us quit fooling."  
And the doubters were silenced for the hour.

The hymn-singer endeavored to raise a chorus. He was not greeted with enthusiasm, but a few valiant spirits came to his assistance. A couple of hymns were feebly rendered—and again—silence.

"Say when," observed Pyne calmly when he entered the service-room to find Brand trimming the spare lamp.  
"Not to-night," said Brand.  
"Why not? Hell may break loose at any moment downstairs."  
"What has occurred? I heard something of a dispute when the watch mustered at eight o'clock."  
"Things are worse now. One of the men found a gallon of methylated spirit in the work-shop."  
"Good Heavens! Did he drink any of it?"  
"He and his mates have emptied the tin. Eight are helplessly drunk—the others quarrelsome. The next thing will be a combined rush for the storeroom."  
"But why did not the second officer tell me?"  
"He thought you had troubles enough. If he could depend on the remainder of the crew he would rope the sinners. Says he knows a slave knot that will make 'em tired."  
Brand's eyes glistened.  
"The fools," he said, "and just as the weather is mending, too."  
"You don't mean that?"  
"Listen."  
He glanced up at the glass dome. Heavy drops were pattering on it; they looked like spray, but Pyne shouted gleefully:  
"Is it raining?"  
"Yes. I was just going to summon the watch to help in filling every vessel. By spreading canvas sheets we can gather a large supply if it rains hard. Moreover, it will beat the sea down. Man alive, this may mean salvation. Tie those weaklings and summon ever sicker man to help."  
With a whoop, Pyne vanished. He met Constance on the stairs, coming to see her father before she stretched her weary limbs on the hard floor of the kitchen.

She never knew exactly what took place. It might have been politeness, but it felt uncommonly like a squeeze, and Pyne's face was extraordinarily close to hers as he cried:  
"It's raining. No more canvas whiskey. Get a hustle on with every empty vessel."  
He need not have been in such a whirl, however.

When the shower came it did not last very long, and there were difficulties in the way of garnering the thrice blessed water. In the first place, the lighthouse was exposed, designed to shoot off all such external supplies; in the second, the total quantity obtained did not amount to more than half a gallon.

But it did a great deal of good in other ways. It brightened many faces, it caused the drunkards to be securely trussed like plucked fowls and dumped along the walls of the entrance passage, and it gave Brand some degree of hope that the rescue operations of the next day might be more successful.

When the rain cleared off, the moon flickered in a cloudy sky. This was a further omen of better fortune. Perhaps, the jingling rhyme of Admiral Fitzroy's barometer was about to be justified:  
"Long foretold,  
Long last;  
Short notice  
Soon past."

And the hurricane had given but faint warning of its advent.  
"I feel it in my bones that we shall all be as frisky as lambs to-morrow," said Pyne, when he joined Brand after the scurry caused by the rain had ceased.  
"We must not be too sanguine. There is a chance, now. I won't deny that, but the sea is treacherous."  
"This reef licks creation. At Bar Harbor, in Maine, where a mighty big sea can kick up in a very few hours, I have seen it go down again like magic under a change of wind."  
"That is quite reasonable. Any ordinary commotion has room to spread itself in the tide-way. Here the tide is broken up into ocean rivers, streams with boundaries as definite as the Thames. The main body sweeps up into the bottle-neck of the Channel. Another tributary comes round the north of the Scilly Isles and runs into the tidal stream again except at this point. The result often is that whilst little pleasure boats can safely run out into the Bay from Penzance there is a race over the rock that would break up a stranded battleship."  
"Say, do you like this kind of life?"  
"I have given my best years to it." Pyne was smoking a pipe, one which Brand lent him. The tobacco was a capital substitute for food, especially as he had established a private understanding with Elsie and Mamie that they were to waylay him when possible and nibble a piece of biscuit he carried in his pocket.  
"This arrangement was to be kept a strict secret from all especially from Miss Constance and Miss Enid, whilst the little ones themselves did not know that the she-dragons whom Pyne feared so greatly gave them surreptitious doses from the last tin of condensed milk, retained for their exclusive benefit."  
"Do you mind me saying that you are a good bit of an enigma?" he hazarded, between puffs.  
"It may be so, but I like the service."  
"Just so. I was never so happy as when I took a trip as fourth engineer on a tramp in the Gulf of Florida. But that didn't signify being tied to a long-nosed oiler for the remainder of my days."  
"Are you a marine engineer?" inquired Brand, with some show of interest.  
"I hold a certificate, just for fun. I had a mechanical twist in me and gave it play. But I am an idler by profession."  
"An idler, eh? You do not strike me as properly classed."  
"It's the fact, nevertheless. My grandfather was pleased to invest a few dollars in real estate on the sheep farm where Manhattan Avenue now stands. My uncle has half; my mother had the other half."  
"Are both of your parents dead?"  
"Yes, years ago. Lost at sea, too, on my father's yacht."  
"What a terrible thing!"  
"It must have been something like that. I was only six years old at the time. My uncle lost his wife and child, too, when the Esmeralda went down. It nearly killed him. I never thought he would marry again, but I suppose he's tired of being alone."  
"Probably. By the way, now that you mention it, Mrs. Vansittart wished to see me yesterday. I could not spare a moment so I sent her a civil message. She told Constance that she thought she knew me."  
"Hardly likely," smiled Pyne. "If you have passed nearly the whole of your life in lighthouses."  
"I did not quite mean to convey that impression. I knew a man of her late husband's name many years ago."  
"She is a nice woman in some ways," said Pyne reflectively. "Not quite my sort, perhaps, but a lady all the time. She is not an American. Came to the States about '90, I think and lost her hubby on a ranch in California. Anyhow, the old man is dead stuck on her, and they ought to hit it off well together. The Vansittart you knew didn't happen to marry a relative of yours?"  
"No. He was a mere acquaintance."  
"Odd thing," ruminated Pyne. "It just occurred to me that she resembles your daughter,—your elder daughter,—not so much in face as in style. Same sort of graceful figure, only a trifle smaller."  
"Such coincidences often happen in the human family. For instance, you are not wholly unlike Enid."  
"Holy gee!" said Pyne, "I'm too run down to stand flattery."  
"Likeness is often a matter of environment. Characteristics, mannerisms, the subtle distinctions of class and social rank, soak in through the skin quite as sensibly as they are colored by heredity. Take the ploughman's son and rear him in a royal palace, turn the infant prince into a peasant, and who shall say, when they reach man's estate, 'This is the true King.' You will remember it was said of the Emperor Augustus: 'Urben lateritium inventit, marmoreum reliquit.'" He found the city brick, he left it marble. The same noble result may be obtained in every healthy child properly educated."

The college-bred youth had not entered into any general conversation with Brand before. He had the tact now to conceal his astonishment at the manner of his friend's speech.  
"You fling heredity to the winds, then?" he asked.  
Brand rose to his feet, as was his way when deeply moved.  
"Thank God, yes!" he cried.  
A faint hoot came to them through the chortling of the wind.  
"One of our visitors," shouted Brand, "and here we are gossiping as though snugly seated in arm-chairs at the fireside."  
He hurried to the gallery, putting on an off-skin coat.

"We must win through, and I guess I'll play ball with my father-in-law," quoth Pyne to himself as he followed. This time it was the Falcon alone, and she signaled with a lamp that it was deemed best to defer active operations until the following afternoon. The tide at dawn would not suit.

She went off, and the two men returned to the grateful shelter of the service-room.

Brand forbade further talk. Pyne must rest now and relieve him at three o'clock. The youngster needed no feebly quick time. There is a supper less hunger which keeps people awake at night with full order in the house. The grade article differs from the cultured one so greatly that the man who hungers of necessity cannot sleep too much.

Thus far, the inhabitants of the lighthouse had been given quite enough nutriment to maintain life. There was no reason why any, even the most delicate, should be in real danger during the next forty-eight hours. But scientific reasoning and the animal instincts of mankind clash at times; in that the danger whose looker forth was deepening the lines in the corners of Brand's eyes.

Every hour, the officer on duty and some men of the watch visited him to report that all was well below. Some of the less drunken mutineers were pitifully sober now: the others were maudlin. Beyond the few words exchanged on this and kindred topics, he was left alone with his thoughts throughout the silent watch. Pyne slept heavily. Glancing at times at the youngster's stalwart figure and firm, handsome face, Brand found himself reviewing the buried years. He thought of the days when he, too, looked forth on the world with the stern enthusiasm of triumphant youth. Long-forgotten ghosts were resurrected, shattered ideals built up again. He wondered, if the decades rolled back, would he decide, a second time, to abandon the fine career which lay at his feet and withdraw his grief and his talents to the seclusion of lonely rocks and silent headlands!

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